

## The Idea of a Teacher: Paradigms of Change

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### Abstract

The focus of the article is the 'idea' of a teacher; not just the proactive role teachers play in inculcating creative traits in students but the meaning of a teacher within an institution. Is the idea of a teacher a dated notion of a paternalistic figure playing the role of transmitter of values from a mainstream social order to students in classrooms who are relearning what has already been given to them within the confines of a home? Have teachers been made redundant in the era of Internet technologies where information along with critical interpretations have taken an impersonal character and students are less inclined to be influenced by one dominant way of thinking? Although information is democratized to include wider sections of people, there is no basis to subscribe to the notion that people are more open-minded than in earlier times. The argument applies to the idea of a teacher as well: while corporatization at a global level has reduced the role of a teacher to *teaching* what is useful in fulfilling the requirements of the free market, the resistance of students to tailored worldviews is greater than ever before. There are changing paradigms of the *idea* of a teacher while there are also paradigms of change that teachers could espouse to bring about social and political transformation. My paper deals with the dynamics of imagining such a transformation.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Teacher, Paradigm, Radical, Media, Educator, Emancipation

### Paradigm called Teaching

With respect to the idea of a teacher which the article uses in a broad though literal sense, 'changing paradigms' is placed in opposition to 'paradigms of change' as containing two diverse viewpoints. The changing paradigms stand for views about teaching that emerge with each new wave in social and political life while paradigms of change refer to ideas that serve as impetus to new discoveries or inventions along with newer outlooks. A changing paradigm is what happens from the outside such as changes in technology that effect social relations while paradigms of change are about how individuals and social groups respond to larger transformations and arrive at innovative ways of thinking about change. The idea of a teacher as a changing paradigm is not the same as what we encounter in the role of a teacher as a harbinger of change. The continuity between the two paradigms might be less than obvious unless we take a social historical perspective that is able to identify trajectories of change that throw light on the imagery that is constructed around teachers and the profession of teaching. Paolo Freire observes that 'education is suffering from narration sickness' (Freire, 2005: 71). He adds: 'The outstanding characteristic of this

narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power' (Freire, 2005: 71). The teacher becomes a narrator who fills the students with what is believed to be important to the latter. Freire arrives at the banking concept of education 'in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits' (Freire, 2005: 72). The worst kind of a teacher is one who plays the role of a banker rather than a 'revolutionary educator' whose 'efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization' (Freire, 2005: 75). The changing paradigm might insist that we digitalize the classroom and the teacher play the role of a mediator between the technology and the student but a paradigm of change is where the teacher refuses to perform the role of a 'bank clerk educator' (Freire, 2005: 76) and instead is a 'problem-posing educator' whose function is to strive 'for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality' (Freire, 2005: 81). The opposition that Freire speaks of is where education is either the 'practice of freedom' or the 'practice of domination' (Freire, 2005: 81). An education that engages with the 'practice of freedom' challenges the politics of a repressive society; but, how does the 'practice of freedom' as a paradigm of change operate where the teacher by any definition is less informed than internet technologies that make available the latest happening in the world and give agency to students to propose an alternative viewpoint?

The argument in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is relevant to a situation where the teacher plays the role of a giver and the student that of a receiver. Can it be functional in a situation where the teacher's role is being questioned to a degree where he or she is no more this fountain of knowledge that students have to dip into in order to slake their thirst for learning? Is it not more to the point to look at a banking concept of *media* where through popular films and social media large scale indoctrination is being attempted to an extent hitherto unknown in history? Chomsky notes, 'whether they're called 'liberal' or 'conservative,' the major media are large corporations...they sell a product to a market. The market is advertisers...The product is audiences' (Chomsky, 2011: 67). As 'part of a larger doctrinal system' that includes 'journals of opinion, the schools and universities, academic scholarship and so on' (Chomsky, 2011: 68), the media 'serve to divert the unwashed masses and reinforce the basic social values: passivity, submissiveness to authority, the overriding virtue of greed and personal gain, lack of concern for others, fear of real or imagined enemies, etc. The goal is to keep the bewildered herd bewildered' (Chomsky, 2011: 69). The doctrinal impact of 'schools and universities' pales in comparison to media and the internet. Where the owners of technologies are powerful corporations, any possibility of reflecting on the prospects of liberation involves asking questions about the tools themselves and how the interests of the owners are being served. A pedagogy that reflects the needs of the oppressed has to emanate through individual agency. Assuming that the teacher's role in the 'doctrinal system' is one of ensuring that the students are pliant in the classroom, he or she in subtle ways, without conspicuously deviating from the curriculum, ought to inculcate in students the 'practice of freedom.'

It is at the level of definitions that teachers could play a role in expanding the scope of social and political meanings in an area of study. This does not mean that everything is reduced to black and white terms and students are indoctrinated into taking a certain set of terms as given such as 'bourgeoisie' or 'feudal' to mean everybody who is opposed to our way of thinking as it happened in the former Soviet Union's educational system. Likewise, as Chomsky notes, for the American political establishment, 'The term 'communist' has a technical sense in planning circles, as in media and commentary, referring to labor leaders, peasant activists, human rights workers, priests reading the Gospels with peasants and organizing self-help group' (Chomsky, 2010: 23) because the US policy makers were deeply troubled that poorer countries were embarking on redistributive justice along with a sincere attempt to raise the living standards of the masses. This somehow had to be ideologically combated and what better way to do it than by labeling them 'communists.' If the teacher has to maintain a level of 'critical' thinking without letting clichés overtake a real understanding of the world that comes from experience it would be a pedagogy where the oppressed are taught to introspect and take moral issues as seriously as political and social issues.

My concern is not with the teacher as a moralist who replaces the parents as much as someone who could play the role of a conscientious objector because the demands of thinking cannot be placed too far away from the need to have a conscience in how one relates to people. Although paternalism of an intrusive kind is frowned upon, the image of the teacher in popular imagination continues to be associated with a form of caring sometimes at the expense of ambiguities that go into choices in the making of his or her personhood. The metaphor of a teacher as in Confucius, the Buddha and Christ has done more justice to the term in considering teaching to be synonymous with preaching with the intent of transforming humankind. Yet, the ideal, not an entirely implausible one, is to view teaching as work that one chooses while those who are in other occupations are there so for material reasons rather than out of love for the profession. The point is not whether there is a teacher in all of us like an artist who wishes to contribute to humanity's difference. The point is that teaching is a specific discourse or language-game with a set of parameters that need to be laid out for purposes of identification. There is no essence to either teaching or the teacher. What is most likely to be the case is that most people in the profession of a teacher are in it for lack of choice or as the most suitable among available options at a given point in their pursuit of a career. Popular images of teachers undoubtedly rely upon paradigms in the sense in which Thomas Kuhn defines them in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

In its established usage, a paradigm is an accepted model or pattern, and that aspect of its meaning has enabled me, lacking a better word, to appropriate 'paradigm' here. But it will shortly be clear that the sense of 'model' and 'pattern' that permits the appropriation is not quite the one usual in defining

'paradigm.' In grammar, for example, 'amo, amas, amat' is a paradigm because it displays the pattern to be used in conjugating a large number of other Latin verbs, e.g., in producing 'laudo, laudas, laudat.' In this standard application, the paradigm functions by permitting the replication of examples any one of which could in principle serve to replace it. (Kuhn, 1996: 23)

There is an 'established usage' to teaching that is attached to notions of 'care' and to a certain extent 'preaching' –not in the conventional sense, but as in attempts to influence the way a student or a child responds to social reality. A broad list of features on which there is a general agreement is given to the role of a teacher. More than the 'replication of examples' that Kuhn talks about, what is important are the elements that constitute the paradigm in the first place. A paradigm of teaching in relation to change must be able to fulfill certain basic expectations within a social order. There are no universal paradigms and the fact remains that discussions with regard to teachers and teaching are bound to be language, region, class, gender and culture-specific in more ways than one. Raymond Williams in *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* while tracing the history of the usage of the word 'educate' observes that though the word originally meant 'to rear or bring up children,' it could in fact mean anything depending on what we want it to mean.

To **educate** was originally to rear or bring up children, from rw *educare*, L – to rear or foster (rather than from *educere* - lead forth, develop, of which *educare* is an intensive form) and fw *educationem*, L, in the same general sense. The wide sense has never quite been lost but it has been specialized to organized teaching and instruction since c17 and predominantly so since c18. When a majority of children had no such organized instruction the distinction between **educated** and **uneducated** was reasonably clear, but, curiously, this distinction has been more common since the development of generally organized education and even of universal education. There is a strong class sense in this use, and the level indicated by **educated** has been continually adjusted to leave the majority of people who have received an education below it. The structure has probably been assisted by the surviving general sense of bringing-up, as in *properly brought-up* which can be made to mean anything a particular group wants it to mean. (111-112).

Two important aspects emerge from the above quote: one is that education originally meant 'to rear or bring up children.' Something of the original meaning continues into the present where a teacher is expected to 'bring up,' while he or she is in fact educating the student as in providing knowledge of a certain kind. Of equal importance is the second aspect where education is related to being 'properly brought-up.' The latter with its status and class associations is not really about acquisition of knowledge. For instance you could pejoratively refer to a brilliant doctor who behaves badly with his patients as 'uneducated.' In such a situation the term educated as opposed to uneducated is more about attitude and behavior or rather what kinds of values we

expect people to uphold in their public or private lives. In Luis Bunuel's movie *The River and Death* Santa Viviana is a village with men trapped in false notions of honor and vendetta killings; one of the main characters is waiting for the arrival of the protagonist who is a doctor to settle a blood feud. However, the doctor refuses to enter the contest; instead, he tells his opponent, 'I don't hate you and I don't have a macho reputation to uphold...when will you understand that you should only risk your life for a noble cause?' (Bunuel). Education is supposed to reflect a certain kind of respect for life and Bunuel seems to strongly endorse such a view of education as an antidote to feudalism.

However, associating education with attitudes might also serve as justification of traditional prejudices we hold against people who belong to a specific group. Hence the use of terms such as 'good' or 'bad' education to indicate fixed expectations built around what we perceive as representative of a kind of person. They may not have serious implications as far as academics are concerned but a student who takes drugs could easily be labeled as 'badly' educated or ill-brought up. To that extent a teacher could become morally responsible for the level of 'education' of a student as in being 'well brought-up.' In fact this is the sense that is popularized in literature and cinema to a great extent thus emphasizing the ability of the teacher to shape the student's personhood. The idea of a 'Teacher's Day' which is celebrated in most countries of the world is rooted in this recognition of the possible influence teachers could have on students.

### **Teacher as Educator**

A paradigm of education is inseparable from a paradigm of teaching although education is a broader term with both intellectual and moral connotations. A teacher as moral instructor and education as having to do with moral instruction are ideas that dominate the day-to-day life of academics in their relation to students. This does not exclude how power relations operate and students are ready to challenge being disempowered by a system of patronage as reflected in grading and the criteria used for evaluation of assignments. When the stand-up comedian George Carlin says that 'child worship' has led to an unrealistic view of all children being born special owing to the self-esteem movement, he makes an important point with regard to democratic education and its relation to political correctness. The false notion that everyone is born 'special' with special abilities and that each one could be a Beethoven or a Shakespeare if only he or she tried hard enough is a disastrous outcome of social democracy and popular films. The idea of political equality is confused with the idea that all have equal abilities which is clearly never the case. The demands of political correctness where the teacher and the institution have to be careful in using language that might indicate criticism of the student in any manner has led to internalizing of a warped sense of selfhood with the blind belief in one being as good as any other getting reinforced to the point where it becomes illogical. Bertrand Russell takes the view that this is an evil that could be connected to 'democratic education' itself.

Democratic education unadulterated has evils which are as great as those of aristocracy, if not greater. Democracy as a sentiment has two sides. When it says 'I am as good as you', it is wholesome; but when it says 'you are no better than I am', it becomes oppressive and an obstacle to the development of exceptional merit. To put the matter more accurately: democracy is good when it inspires self-respect, and bad when it inspires persecution of exceptional individuals by the herd. (Russell, 2010: 55)

Unfortunately the 'sentiment' which declares 'you are no better than I am' is the one that democratic education especially through social media has popularized leading to a marginalization of 'exceptional individuals.' The standardization of definitions of merit in order to enforce conformity upon those who are exceptional can be a source of persecution to the latter. This argument might apply to exceptional teachers as well as to exceptional students.

One does not have to get too deep into the argument as to what parameters constitute the 'exceptional' because exceptionality as in unusual talent does not come in the way of creating an inclusive social order. The changing paradigm of teaching owing to popularization of 'democratic education' while has done tremendous good in including large sections of people hitherto denied of basic education has in the process diluted the rigors of a system in order to enable more and more students to acquire grades without meeting the criteria laid down by the system. The politics of accommodation in the name of diversity and multiculturalism without dismantling the hierarchies of domination and the failure to devise a curriculum that could genuinely incorporate differences is at the root of the dilution of educational system as a whole. In the article 'Toward a woman-centered university' Adrienne Rich argues that the university needs to 'dehierarchized':

I have described the university as a hierarchy built on exploitation. To become truly educated and self-aware, against the current of patriarchal education, a woman must be able to discover **and** explore her root connection with all **women**. Her previous education has taught her only of her prescribed relationships with men, or 'Women beware women.' Any genuine attempt to fill this need would become a force for the dehierarchizing of the university. For it would have to involve all women in the institution, simultaneously, as students and as teachers, besides drawing on the special experience of nonacademic women, both within and outside the university-the grandmothers, the high-school dropouts, the professionals, the artists, the political women, the housewives. And it would involve them at an organic level, not as interesting exhibits or specimens. (Rich, 1979: 128)

The dehierarchizing of the university never took place; what instead happened is 'choice-based' consumerism where the choice itself is fetishized and turned into an object with strong political overtones; one's right to choose is more important than



the options at one's disposal. Self-assertion is about having to choose rather than examining whether the choice enables one to meaningfully relate to people and environment; in such a situation education is stripped of all illusions and reduced to an object to be consumed. In the consumerist paradigm education is what you are able to afford depending on how much you're willing to pay.

The politics of choice is rarely about people who are in situations they have not chosen to be in such as poverty, war and famine. The choice is restricted to objects and what kinds of statements can be made through objects such as clothes, music, food and games; more significantly, the choice is about me being who I am, where the self becomes a reference point for the self; this comes close to completely eliminating the role of others in one's life. Teaching and teachers are pressurized into being accommodative of changing paradigms constructed around student-as-customer model that reflects a free market philosophy where 'satisfaction guarantee' is prioritized over a healthy interaction based on ideas and the possibility of finding happiness with the choices one makes for oneself. Alternatively, higher education has been reduced to formulaic behavior where students wish to begin their political careers as activists or simply cultivate an attitude of rejecting everything that comes out of the teacher's mouth as being the voice of the establishment. With compulsive activism, an expression of forced non-conformism ends up becoming a form of posturing without any serious intent.

In *The Death of Progressive Education: How teachers lost control of the classroom* Roy Lowe documents, both from a historical perspective combined with his own observation, how since the Second World War the teaching community in England lost control of what should be taught and how best it could be done in a classroom. In the concluding chapter he notes three factors as responsible for the current situation: one is the consumerist aspect of society where 'choice has become such a familiar element in governmental rhetoric around education and health care, relegating a concern for the provision of basic standards to the margins of public debate' (Lowe, 2007: 159). This is followed by the 'transformation of mass media' (Lowe, 2007: 160) and the rise of multinational corporations along with the consequent 'transformation of the workplace...by the coming of the computer and new systems of mass communication' (Lowe, 2007: 160). Fierce competition and the need to succeed have literally turned the education system into a manufacturing unit for products. Lowe notes:

The final collapse of the extended family, a growing awareness of the dangers and risks of childhood, together with the new isolated lifestyles of youngsters trapped in a nuclear family with television, mobile phone and text message as their constant companions, have meant a new form of childhood. This has all been confirmed as society has become more litigious, leaving those who work with children increasingly looking over their shoulder for potential trouble. Beyond this, and partly as a result of these developments, play has become far more isolated. The range of play of youngsters, which in my case extended

several miles from my own home during my schooldays, is diminished beyond measure. This means that opportunities for social development, the acquisition of social skills and for self-discovery do not exist for most children as they did fifty years ago. (Lowe, 2007: 160-161)

The children of the present are 'victims' because they are caught in a larger social and economic transformation in which they have no role to play; the education system instead of resisting the collapse of the child's individuality by providing him or her the space for playing, growth and self-examination is in fact endorsing the basis of the new order. While being critical of parents who indulge in 'child-worship,' Carlin points out:

I'm talking about today's professional parents, these obsessive diaper sniffers who are overscheduling and overmanaging their children and robbing them of their childhoods...Something that should be spontaneous and free is now being rigidly planned. When does a kid ever get to sit in the yard with a stick anymore?...a kid shouldn't be wasting his time with a stick anyway. If he's 4 years old, he should be home studying for his kindergarten entrance exams. ...Pressured to succeed for the sake of the parents. Isn't this really just a sophisticated form of child abuse? (Carlin)

Carlin observes that what passes off as child-worship is in fact child abuse; children are simply not allowed to be themselves; an entire education system is being globally created with excessive use of monitoring through cameras in the name of security merely to violently crush individual dissent at the school level itself. No child ever outgrows the abuse at home and school. He or she succumbs to those pressures afraid to deviate or becomes a deviant in response to isolation caused by the inability to accept the abuse as normal. Isolation is indeed a form of violence and nobody should be isolated as an excuse to preserving the child's autonomy. Neglect and indifference could be as dangerous as intrusiveness if not more. The thin line separating caring from an overbearing attitude ought to be respected in how we rear children.

If in Adrienne Rich's view, the university is a 'hierarchy built on exploitation,' it is because the foundations for the hierarchization have been laid through the abuse the child undergoes at home and at school. The root connection of one woman with all women is broken down at the very beginning; however, the agenda of a 'woman-centered' university is about the making of a system that would include people who might not be a part of the university setup. The idea behind the inclusion is that education is broadened to give people a sense of well-being and belonging at one and the same time. The university enters the social universe only to embrace the latter and unconditionally declare that everyone is entitled to the same privileges. It may be an ideal picture of a university but certainly not an unreal one. The role of the teacher as educator is not simply about one who uncritically subscribes to a system of reality that is handed down to him or her. The teacher works against hierarchization through a process of what can be termed as 'assisted unlearning' which enables students to ask



the right kinds of question with regard to their position in relation to rest of the society. If an important part of education is how you treat your fellow beings, ensuring that students recognize the agency of individuals at different social levels, which would include the poor and the marginalized, becomes an important part of learning. In the process of the teacher performing the task of 'assisted unlearning' the student gets an opportunity to critically analyse the views of his or her parents as well as teachers. Adrienne Rich challenges a traditional conception of education in terms of learning and teaching by making a case for a university that works to put an end to exploitation. Boswell in his biography of Samuel Johnson speaks of the latter's praise for the University of Salamanca in Spain for the view they took against the occupation of America. Boswell quotes Johnson on this point:

'I love the University of Salamanca; for when the Spaniards were in doubt as to the lawfulness of their conquering America, the University of Salamanca gave it as their opinion that it was not lawful.' He spoke this with great emotion, and with that generous warmth which dictated the lines in his *London*, against Spanish encroachment. (Boswell, 1958: 321)

Johnson, in an interesting manner, shares Adrienne Rich's view of the university as an institution that stands for social and political justice. A university as a paradigm of growing in terms of both the heart and the mind, especially the latter, is one of the underlying principles of higher education. Cardinal Newman begins the preface to his classic essay *The Idea of a University* with the lines that we tend to imagine an ideal university: 'The view taken of a University in these Discourses is the following:—That it is a place of *teaching universal knowledge*.' The radical implications of this idea of a university as a space where knowledge can be pursued for its own sake with research as the handmaiden of teaching raises important questions: can universal knowledge be taught without any reference to the particular or if the particular makes sense only in a universal frame of reference? Is there something called 'universal knowledge' that is meaningful in the absence of the members of a social order who interpret this knowledge to suit specific interests? 'I took your advice and saw *The Dead Poets Society*. What a good movie!' says a character in the last movie *Red* from Kieslowski's famed trilogy *Three Colors*. In spite of being a successful and a widely imitated movie, the fact that John Keating as the inspiring English teacher is far from radical is obvious. What is as obvious is the fact that Keating is a dreamer and not a teacher in the sense that those who are a part of the profession understand it: teaching is rarely about providing inspiration, but is a practical activity like cooking and cleaning. What it is in the character of Keating that the Kieslowski-persona in the movie *Red* likes a lot? Kieslowski writes in his autobiographical *I'm so-so*:

The concept of sin is tied up with this abstract, ultimate authority which we often call God. But I think that there's also a sense of sin against yourself which is important to me and really means the same thing. Usually, it results from weakness, from the fact that we're too weak to resist temptation; the

temptation to have more money, comfort, to possess a certain woman or man, or the temptation to hold more power. (Kieslowski, 1998: 68)

The reason Keating possesses moral authority as a teacher is because he will not sin *against* himself. Keating's radicalism may not be political but is certainly emotional; it gives the students a chance to honestly confront their true selves. A teacher like Keating provides an inspiring moment in the student's otherwise bland lives at Welton Academy. An authoritarian context, such as the one portrayed in the movie, might make Keating look revolutionary because of his unorthodox ways of teaching. In a context where authoritarianism is much more implicit and students have the classroom freedom to read texts in any manner that pleases them, a teacher like Keating, rather than get fired, might actually be in line for a promotion thanks to his ingenuous ways of reaching out to the young. The Keating approach to a text which emphasizes that students must be creative is accepted as the norm in most modern classrooms. Unfortunately there is neither research available nor is it possible to measure objectively to what extent are teachers sinning against themselves in order to justify the global hostility that is faced by the teaching class especially at higher levels making teaching itself a rather unattractive profession as a whole. A fairly recent article titled, 'Seven reasons people no longer want to be teacher,' speaks of the 'alarming drops in first preference applications for this year's teacher preparation courses' in Queensland, Australia. While this drop might not be true of other regions of the world, the reasons for the fall in numbers are familiar ones as stated in the article.

It's not surprising, then, that numbers of applicants for teacher education programs have slumped. The programs are long and intense, the creativity and relationships aspect of the vocation has been eroded, there is pervasive negativity in the media, and comparatively poor salary and working conditions.

Some of the romanticizing of teachers and teaching that we're all familiar with through popular films such as *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) and the *Music of the Heart* (1999) has dissipated with time. This dissipation owes a great deal to a post-structural, deconstructive reading of the teaching profession as primarily a discourse of power relations. The apolitical, professional teacher is looked upon with visible disdain in the classrooms of both the humanities and the social sciences. The idea that everything by definition is 'political' has come to mean that teachers must take a political stand and play the role of activists rather than sharing knowledge for knowledge's sake. If the conventional idea of a teacher is that of a knowledge-sharer or one whose work is to ensure that students have the required skills for a job, this is not the definition of teaching that is in vogue. Far from Newman's idea of the university dedicated to 'universal knowledge,' Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* states that: 'The structure of the university field reflects the structure of the field of power, while its own activity of selection and indoctrination contributes to the reproduction of the structure' (Bourdieu, 1988: 40-41). Raymond Williams in *Resources of Hope* objects to the idea that one must study in preparation towards a job which undoubtedly is one of the

most accepted beliefs in the need for an education which is to acquire the necessary skills for a position. 'I cannot accept that education is a training for jobs, or for making useful citizens (that is fitting into this system)...I ask for a common education that will give our society its cohesion, and prevent it disintegrating into a series of specialist departments, the nation becoming a firm' (Williams, 1989: 14). If the education system must be neither a training area for the mechanical pursuit of a job nor a center for indoctrination into a political order, it ought to be a space where one could look for non-violent solutions to day-to-day problems. Education should serve as means to bring together people from different classes and social backgrounds so that problems could be worked out in a way where everyone has a voice to represent social groups of their choice. If we view dialogue as synonymous with non-violence, the teacher's role is fundamentally about exploring how platforms for speaking and opportunities for expression of diverse opinions are achieved in the classroom; how bridges could be built between what happens in schools, colleges and universities and the world outside the institution; how change could be incorporated and tradition subjected to constant reinterpretation; how the manifesto for a larger social transformation with the goal of humanity's emancipation can be intertwined with the curriculum that makes education a more meaningful activity rather than being reduced to a quest for a job.

### **Teacher as Emancipator**

In a chapter titled 'Third World,' Eric Hobsbawm in his autobiography *Interesting Times* respectfully notes that 'wonderful village teachers...were the real agents of emancipation for most of the human race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Hobsbawm, 2008: 374). Coming from a historian of Hobsbawm's stature it is more than just a tribute to the countless teachers living modest, anonymous lives in the villages and small towns. It is their direct contact with the economic lifelines which are the villages that gave the teachers the realization and the ability to influence minds and act as agents of emancipation against violent and destructive forces in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which include colonialism, slavery and anti-Semitism.

A popular representation of the village teacher acting as an agent of emancipation against superstition and illiteracy can be seen in the novel *Fountain and Tomb* by Naguib Mahfouz which gives us two short narratives of teachers in a traditional society. In one of the episodes, the people living in a quarter decide to make a gate in the east wall in order to avoid being harassed by their neighbors. The geography teacher who is ridiculed as 'Professor Falseprophet' tells them that there is a bigger danger than the feuds with the people from the other quarters which comes from nature itself. 'Suppose a heavy rain comes down out of the hills. The wall channels it right into that hole. It rushes in and drowns the whole quarter!...So we forget a very real danger – getting our brains bashed out – in order to avoid a danger that exists only in your head? Get serious' (Mahfouz, 1998: 82). While the teacher's advice is met with mockery and derision, on the day there is a heavy rain corpses crawl out of the graves, 'whole houses collapse, roofs and walls become sieves, and everyone flees to the desert, homeless refugees. On every hand, utter desolation grips the earth and

everything in it' (Mahfouz, 1998: 82). In another episode, Mustafa Al-Dashoory, a water carrier's son, happens to be a teacher with a bit of a philosopher in him. Al-Dashoory confronts the narrator's father with a question as to the meaning of life. Not satisfied with the responses when it comes to the question of God, Al-Dashoory tells the narrator's father that 'belief in God demands belief in his lack of concern for our world, just as it implies that we're on our own' (Mahfouz, 1998: 111). Though the father is shocked by this idea, Al-Dashoory insists,

Mankind won't take life lightly just because God has left the world; there's no avoiding high resolve and new achievements, no escape from morality, law and punishment. People might even begin to look to medical science for help in fighting weaknesses of thought and behavior just as they now seek its aid against physical disease...some day mankind will achieve a certain wholeness in themselves and in society. Then and only then, by virtue of this new human personality, will we understand the meaning of divinity. Its eternal essence will become clear... (Mahfouz, 1998: 11)

The father vehemently protests that the poor, the broken and the diseased need the language of blind faith to find meaning to their suffering; Al-Dashoory notes that his ideas were expected to solve that very poverty, strife and disease. Needless to say, the teacher's reputation for having strange ideas makes him an outcast in the alley.

In the two stories from a writer in a third world country the emphasis is on enlightened rationalism. The teacher is a spokesperson for the use of reason in the conduct of day-to-day affairs; reason becomes the antidote to ignorance stemming out of outmoded beliefs, lack of honesty and compassion along with the privileging of ritual over facts. The association of some kind of idealism with teaching that revolves around interrogating unexamined beliefs is as old as the history of education itself. A teacher as it happens in the Mahfouz stories is supposed to offer an alternative to the dark and gloomy present. By his or her presence in the classroom the teacher has the advantage of using the space to affect students to respond to existential as well as social crises. This may be a simplistic expectation in an age of professionalism where teachers are supposed to do their jobs in order to fulfil responsibilities that come with the position rather than come up with private goals and impose them on students. In the age of information flooding the living rooms of one's imagination, will the teacher's role continue to be that of an interpreter – not to mention that there are countless of them already available on the net? Why should the organic presence of the teacher in a classroom be of any special importance in comparison to what is available on the internet that might be equally if not more informative as far as the subject is concerned? These questions might seem out of context if we embrace the theoretical position that people are affected by other people in more ways than one.

The revolutionary potential of the internet might have significantly altered social relations; but it does not mean that the intrinsically human aspect of how we influence

one another can be substituted with something inanimate. People fall back on people in times of crisis; assuming that there is no crisis we cannot ignore the biological connectedness between members of a social group whether it be the family, school, neighborhood, nation or the globe itself. If a teacher could be replaced with a software program then for exactly the same reason parents and children could also be replaced with something non-human providing substitute gratification. Speaking of 'self-sufficiency,' Aristotle humanely observes, 'We are applying the term 'self-sufficient' not to a person on his own, living a solitary life, but to a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow-citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a social being' (Aristotle, 2004: 11). The usefulness of technology in providing 'self-sufficiency' does not mean that it serves as replacement for a teacher in a classroom whose presence is that of a social being in relation to others. 'For a human is a social being and his nature is to live in the company of others' (Aristotle, 2004: 177). If we safely put aside the notion of individuals as solitary beings, no matter how advanced the technology, it is possible to see the teacher as member of a social and cultural space who is as indispensable as a parent. The 'wonderful village teachers' who played a role in emancipating humanity prove the point in how a teacher could be convinced of his or her power to shape the imagination and destiny of students. Philip Short in his biography *Mao: A Life* mentions that while speaking to Edgar Snow of his school days, Mao Tse-Tung reminisced that

the teacher who made the strongest impression on me was Yang Changji . . . He was an idealist and a man of high moral character. He believed in his ethics very strongly and tried to imbue his students with the desire to become just, moral, virtuous men, useful in society. Under his influence I read a book on ethics [by the neo-Kantian philosopher, Friedrich Paulsen] . . . and was inspired to write an essay entitled 'The Power of the Mind'. I was then an idealist, and my essay was highly praised by Professor Yang Changji. .. He gave me a mark of 100 for it. (Short, 1999: 56-57)

In fact Short observes that Mao himself wanted to be a teacher at some point in his life (Short, 1999: 54). Pierre Brocheux in his biography of Ho Chi Minh says that in the generation of the father of the Vietnamese leader 'new graduates' while tending to pursue careers in bureaucracy 'could also return to the villages to teach or become writers' (Brocheux, 2007: 3). In fact Brocheux observes that 'Ho Chi Minh's father belonged to a world of scholars and officials who were consumed with dismay and bitterness at the realization that French domination of the Vietnamese monarchy would endure and become even stronger in the early twentieth century' (Brocheux, 2007: 5). Apart from that Ho Chi Minh himself was deeply influenced by his teachers.

Although he was sometimes mocked by his fellow students, Thanh earned the respect of several teachers for his tireless curiosity, quick wit, maturity, and talent for writing. One of his French teachers, Mr. Queinnec, returned a paper with this glowing praise: 'Thanh wrote his paper on the writing of verse; he is

an intelligent and very distinguished student.’ As a teenager he enjoyed the history lessons of a Mr. Griffon, who gave fascinating lectures glorifying the French Revolution. Thanh especially admired two of his teachers, the scholar Hoang Thong, who later ran into trouble with the authorities, and the artist Le Van Mien. (Brocheux, 2007: 6)

Duiker, an older biographer of Ho Chi Minh gives us the context to the teaching culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Vietnamese village which was revolutionary because it challenged colonialism from without and feudalism from within. This was an historical attempt to address reactionary forces that led to the stagnation of an entire system and made it possible for the country to be colonized. Colonialism needed feudalism as its bedfellow for it to thrive as a system of governance in the colonies. It was to a large extent the role of the teacher to instill a sense of patriotism among the colonized children in order to create a generation that would fight foreign occupation.

At first the boy (Ho Chi Minh) continued to study the classics with his father, but eventually he was sent to attend a local school taught by his father’s friend Vuong Thuc Qui, the son of the scholar Vuong Thuc Mau, who had committed suicide by throwing himself into a pond to avoid being arrested by the French. Although a degree holder like Sac, Qui had also refused appointment as an official and taught in his home village, where he secretly took part in subversive activities against the puppet government in Hué. In teaching his students, he rejected the traditional pedantic method of forcing his students to memorize texts, but took great care to instruct them in the humanitarian inner core of Confucian classical writings while simultaneously instilling in their minds a fierce patriotic spirit for the survival of an independent Vietnam. To burn his message into their souls, prior to beginning each day’s lecture he lit a lamp at the altar of his father along the wall of his classroom. (Duiker, 2001: 40)

However modest these attempts might have been at that point in time there is little doubt that they paved the way for anti-colonial resistance and the liberation of nations across the globe. In the more emancipated world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will the role of the teacher continue to be a voice of hope and resistance to the disillusioned and the marginalized? The answer to the question lies in viewing the teacher as a changing paradigm which means that the role is redefined with respect to developments in science and technology; it also means that the teacher is a paradigm of change who will impact different areas of social and political life. The question that cannot be ignored is whether teachers are able to resist the attempts of social media where conformism to sectarian ideologies happens at the expense of real dissent? Internet as technology is a liberator; but the ownership by powerful corporations along with the fact that media is dominated by interest groups makes them psychologically and physically oppressive. The view that needs to be promoted is one of teaching as a sustained faith in human equality along with emphasis on the politics of moderation where change through dialogue is celebrated as the only way forward to the human



species. In his article, 'These Kids Could Tutor World Leaders' Kristof observes:

Yet done right, education can be transformative. The evidence suggests that it reduces extremism, empowers women, and promotes development; for the same reason terrorists blow up schools, we should build them. Education is also a bargain: By my back-of-envelope calculations, for about one-half of 1 percent of global military spending, the world could vanquish illiteracy forever by ensuring that every child completes primary school. (Kristof)

The teacher as a symbol of the transformative power of education is about interpreting change in a way that is coherent to the masses, reducing extremism, fighting the empty symbolism of divisive nationalisms, empowering the weakest of the weak, raising the status of women, and about being a viable alternative to the use of force in resolving local as well as global issues. The idea of the teacher as emancipator complements his or her role as educator in a broad sense to mean that a certain aspect of the student's personality continues to be shaped by what happens in the classroom. Although the teacher in a 21<sup>st</sup> century setting has much to worry about legal and political correctness than his or her predecessors, the changes in the outside world must be incorporated and made intelligible to students in the limited space of the classroom. The nature of teaching is complex because a different kind of leadership is expected from teachers who must train a new generation to think clearly and be creative in their outlook. The leadership of the teacher consists in creating leaders at different social levels; this is not to say that everyone in the class is gifted enough to lead a group. An important quality of a leader is self-recognition or the discovery of one's own potential. The teacher as emancipator in the modern classroom is someone who gives the students the confidence to know themselves through a process of self-examination. Mental clarity with respect to goals and creativity in terms of looking for the best possible means to accomplish the set goals is the global need of the hour. An emancipating teacher is a catalyst who makes sure students have a clear view of their goals and a perspective on how best to achieve them.

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